

Rhineland Daily News

Obey Views Local Stimulus Impact

By Luke Laggis, City Editor

Seventh District Congressman Dave Obey was in Rhineland Monday visiting the new U.S. Forest Service office and getting a first-hand look at some of the tangible effects federal stimulus money has had locally.

Obey reiterated a message he has conveyed before, that the Northwoods has benefitted greatly.

“Very few communities have received more significant help under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) than has Rhineland,” he said.

Obey was in town to see first-hand how the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest plans to use the \$5 million received in federal recovery funds for efforts that will provide employment for local people and refurbish forest facilities. The funding for these efforts came through legislation produced by the House Appropriations Committee, which Obey chairs.

The Forest Service will be moving into its new offices — the former Department of Transportation building on Hanson Lake Road — in November. The move will consolidate several offices into one central location that will help improve workflow.

“Our various departments will now be all together in one building,” said Suzanne Flory, a spokesperson for the Forest Service. “We will be moving 46 staff members to the new site. We have a capacity for 60. The new building is laid out for work groups — public affairs, planning, archeology, budget and forestry. We’re staying in Rhineland, inside the city limits. We’ll have more parking and the whole building is handicapped accessible. We’re looking forward to serving the public better.”

The Forest Service received funding for 19 projects within Obey’s congressional district. There is an historic symmetry with the projects, which include renovations of some old Civil Conservation Corps camps. The camps were built when Americans were struggling through the Great Depression, and now, as the country comes to grips with a major recession, government funds are supporting some of these same projects once again. Obey’s own father worked in the Glidden CCC camp as a young man, and Obey said he’s pleased the stimulus funds are helping

preserve that heritage.

Flory said to this point most of the contractors the Forest Service has hired have been from the local area, though that will likely not always be the case as they are bound to the lowest bidder. In cases where the lowest bidder is not local, she said it's still bringing money into the area through food, fuel and lodging.

Working with the communities within the forest to identify projects that will be locally beneficial has also been a priority, Flory said. She said rebuilding a small bridge may not necessarily be a high priority for the Forest Service, but it can have a big impact in that town. The cooperation is good for both, she said.

Obey said he's had lots of questions from constituents concerning the recovery act. Many people don't understand it, he said, and others question if it will work. He said the program wasn't designed to solve all of the country's economic problems, but to help transition from recession to economic growth.

"This isn't big enough by itself to fill the hole, but it sure can soften the blow," Obey said.

Rhineland also received significant federal grants through the Recovery Act for work at the airport and upgrades to the community's sewer and water system, and Obey said he is seeing the program's benefits all over his district.

The Forest Service is scheduled to move into its new offices at the beginning of November. An open house will be held in December.

Original article is located [here](#) .